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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA ZAMBRANO AND WHA/CAN

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SUBJECT: CANADIAN POLICY ON CUBA

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11. (SBU) The Government of Canada continues to promote the advancement of democracy, good governance, and human rights in Cuba according to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Officials. Canada shares the U.S. goals of promoting democracy and human rights in Cuba, while maintaining its own policy of "principled engagement" with both the Cuban government and dissident elements. The GOC believes its approach allows it to have a positive impact on human rights and democracy in Cuba. Canada maintains a diplomatic presence in Havana and conducts aid programs worth about C\$10 million/year.

12. (SBU) DFAIT Officials said that Canada has engaged and intervened on behalf of human rights and the advancement of democratization in Cuba a number of times over the past six months. According to DFAIT:

-- Canadian and Cuban officials met regularly to discuss the harsh treatment of dissidents. Conversations were reportedly "firm and frank." DFAIT officials said that meeting with dissidents is a normal part of Canadian diplomatic work in Cuba, though they could provide no specific examples of meetings. However, the DFAIT Cuba desk officer and deputy director said they were unaware of the existence of dissident journalist and academic groups, members of which meet regularly with USINT officers.

-- the Canadian Embassy in Havana has recently opened the seventh Canadian Studies Center in Cuba. These centers, funded by Canada and run by the Cuban Ministry of Education, reportedly inform the general populace about life in a democratic country with a market-based economy. The Canadian Government also regularly sends speakers to these venues, as well as funds economics professors teaching modern economic theory at the University of Havana. Canada plans to open its eighth center in July, according to DFAIT contacts.

-- the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), a Canadian government-funded think tank, runs a series of programs (in Canada) on Cuba that focus on support for dissidents and democratization. FOCAL documents all Cuban government actions against dissidents, supports an active dialogue on planning for the post-Castro area, and assists civil society programs on human rights and democracy.

13. (SBU) According to DFAIT officials, high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and Canada over the past six months have included National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon attendance at an academic conference in Kingston, Ontario in early May. Alarcon also visited Ottawa where he met with the Members of Parliament from the Cuba-Canada

Inter-Parliamentary Group, including Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe. Notably, Cuba cancelled the planned mid-May visit of Canadian Minister of State for the Americas Peter Kent to Havana. Kent told reporters prior to his planned visit that he aimed to use his scheduled meeting with Cuban President Raul Castro to raise democratic reform and human rights. DFAIT contacts say the Cuban government also took offense at recent strong pro-human rights statements by Prime Minister Harper.

¶4. (SBU) Media reports indicate that Canada remains Cuba's third largest trade partner, with trade growing by 9.4% in ¶2008. Canadian companies operate in a variety of sectors of the Cuban economy, including tourism, construction, agriculture, bio-technology, and mining. According to Canadian Government statistics Canadian exports to Cuba in QCanadian Government statistics Canadian exports to Cuba in 2007 were estimated at C\$ 563 million (USD 524 million). Main exports are machinery, electronic equipment, motor vehicles, as well as copper, iron, and steel products. Canadian imports from Cuba were worth about C\$1.06 billion (USD 988 million) in 2007. Primary imports are tobacco, books and newspapers, and seafood. Canadians make up close to one-third of Cuba's foreign tourists.

¶5. (SBU) The media also reported that the Canadian Wheat Board and Cuba's Alimport signed an agreement at the Havana Trade Fair for the sale of 150,000 tons of Canadian wheat to Cuba. Canada is one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba. Canadian natural resources company Sheritt International, the largest and most established Canadian firm in Cuba, engages in mining, oil and gas production, electricity generation, and soybean processing.

¶6. (SBU) Canada has no bilateral trade agreements with Cuba. According to DFAIT, Canada and Cuba are currently in the

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early stages of negotiating a Foreign Investment Protection Agreement (a bilateral investment treaty).

¶7. (U) Canada has no formal exchange programs specific to Cuba. The Canadian government maintains a Canada-Caribbean Community Leadership Scholarship Program offering university students scholarships for short-term research exchanges, for which students from across the Caribbean -- including Cuba -- are eligible to apply. In addition, many exchanges occur informally between organizations such as high school sports teams and cultural groups.

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